

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SECOND PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 3 February 1998, at 10 a.m.

President:

Mr. Norberg

(Sweden)

The PRESIDENT: I declare open the 782nd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

At the outset, I should like to extend on behalf of the Conference, and on my own behalf, a warm welcome to our distinguished visitor today, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, the Honourable Alexander Downer, who will be our first speaker. His presence among us again today testifies to the continued importance attached by his Government to our Conference.

Besides the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, I have on my list of speakers for today the representatives of Austria, Finland and the Russian Federation.

I should like to remind you that we will hold informal open-ended consultations on agenda item 3, "Prevention of an arms race in outer space", immediately after this plenary meeting, and on agenda item 4, "Negative security assurances", in the afternoon beginning at 3.30 p.m., in this room.

I now have pleasure inviting the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, the Honourable Alexander Downer, to make his statement.

Mr. DOWNER (Australia): I am very pleased to have this opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament.

The fact that this is my second visit in as many years is testimony to the importance my country accords this institution and the contribution it has made to building a more secure world.

In a very real and concrete sense, your task is the biblical one of beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks.

This is a noble and important mission, particularly in this period of uncertainty and rapid change. It is vital that we continue to seize the opportunities currently available to put in place the arms control and disarmament norms on which a stable security environment for the twenty-first century can be built.

I would like today to present an Australian perspective on the way ahead.

I pay tribute to you, Ambassador Norberg, and through you, your country, Sweden. Sweden and Australia share many common principles and perspectives in the field of disarmament, and we have worked in productive partnership on many occasions.

The CD is facing a difficult and challenging year, and it is fortunate that someone of your experience and diplomatic skill should be in a position to guide it at the outset.

In my address to you last year, I said that the Conference on Disarmament was at a crossroads.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

A year later, a wasted year in many respects, an outside observer might be forgiven for thinking that the CD had pitched its tent at the crossroads, unpacked its bags, and begun to get comfortable.

This is not to denigrate the importance of ideological and philosophical debate in underpinning the practical disarmament work this Conference was established to do.

After two major achievements in quick succession, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, "Whither the CD?" is a valid question for debate.

It is just that the debate, or at least the terms in which the question is posed, has become rather closed and repetitive.

The key to unlocking it is clearly the question of nuclear disarmament.

I can understand and support the sentiments of those who want faster progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Australia is as committed as any in this room to the twin, linked goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation enshrined in article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

The sooner the Nuclear-Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) achieves universal adherence and full implementation, the safer the world will be.

But it is necessary to ask ourselves - and more particularly, yourselves, distinguished delegates to the Conference on Disarmament - what practical, realistic contribution each of us can make to bringing this state of affairs about.

The START process has, when measured against the complexity of the task and the titanic scale of cold war nuclear arsenals, achieved substantial, real nuclear arms reductions in a very short time.

I very much look forward to Russia's speedy ratification of START II and a formal beginning to negotiations on START III which will further reduce the strategic nuclear warhead stockpiles of both the United States and Russia to some 80 per cent below cold war peaks.

Would it help, as some appear to be proposing, to bring the START process into this chamber and subject it to preordained timetables and negotiation by 60 countries instead of 2?

Would that accelerate the business of getting rid of actual nuclear weapons?

I would guess that even the most ardent supporters of this institution, among whom I am happy to count myself, would concede that it would not.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

That was also the conclusion of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, whose report I had the honour to present to you last year, a report which, I am pleased to note, continues to be drawn on in the debate on the way forward on nuclear disarmament.

This is not to say, of course, that this Conference and the great majority of the community of nations are to be for ever excluded from a process of vital concern to their security.

The post-START-III nuclear landscape will open up a range of exciting prospects in which the CD and nations outside the five declared nuclear-weapon States, particularly those operating currently unsafeguarded nuclear facilities, will have a vital role to play in drawing down to a nuclear-weapon-free world, and constructing a verification regime so that we can all be assured it stays that way.

It is, moreover, in this vital area of verification that the CD, with its expertise born of negotiating the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and other instruments, will come consummately into its own.

Nor must we conclude that there is nothing the CD can contribute immediately to the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

The Canberra Commission, in addition to proposing a number of practical steps to the nuclear-weapon States, also identified as a "reinforcing step ... for immediate action" the cessation of the production of fissile material for nuclear explosive purposes, in other words, a "cut-off" treaty, a mandate for which has lain unactioned before you since 1995.

Why is a cut-off treaty worth pursuing at this time?

From our national point of view, Australia long ago decided that our security interests would be best served by not acquiring nuclear weapons.

We made a commitment to this effect through the NPT, and joined similarly minded States in a system of mutual security assurances confirming that they would not seek recourse to nuclear weapons as instruments of political or military policy.

We reached our position on the basis of a hard-headed, pragmatic assessment of our national security interests.

That is, the more nations that possess nuclear weapons, the greater the chance that a future conflict could lead to their use.

If nuclear weapons were to proliferate in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia's strategic environment would be fundamentally altered for the worse.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

As things stand, however, our region benefits enormously from the fact that all regional countries have recognized the obvious value of NPT adherence as a means of permanently preventing nuclear proliferation.

A similar pragmatic assessment of our national security interests has led us to the conclusion that a fissile material cut-off treaty is very much in our interest - indeed, in the interest of every country.

Let me set out for you why I believe Australian interests would be served by a fissile material cut-off treaty; but let me emphasize, too, that these arguments suggest compelling reasons why cut-off would likewise advance the interests not only of other non-nuclear-weapon States like ourselves, but of all States, including nuclear-weapon States and those States which, in their current security environment, are unwilling to make a commitment to foreclose the option of acquiring nuclear weapons.

A fissile material cut-off treaty would give us all greater security by putting a further nail in the coffin of the nuclear arms race and the vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Just as the CTBT is creating a barrier to the qualitative development of nuclear weapons, cut-off will create a barrier to their quantitative development.

It would contribute to the creation of an environment - in the words of the Canberra Commission - "conducive to the elimination of nuclear weapons".

In stark terms, the process of reducing arsenals can only have meaning if we can be assured that there is no parallel build-up of weapons-usable material.

A cut-off treaty would require the nuclear-weapon States to make good their NPT article VI commitment to pursue negotiations related to the cessation of the nuclear arms race.

Importantly, it would also help the nuclear-weapon States to take further steps towards dismantling their nuclear arsenals by creating greater transparency and confidence about the capabilities as well as the intentions of other countries with fissile material production facilities.

Cut-off would also help to redress the admittedly discriminatory nature of the non-proliferation regime by, for the first time, subjecting nuclear facilities in the nuclear-weapon States to obligatory international verification.

It is worth dwelling on this point: facilities among the most sensitive in the nuclear-weapon States - those producing the nuclear material which is the essential building block for any nuclear weapon - would at last be subject to international scrutiny.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

A universally agreed-to cut-off treaty would be a valuable security and confidence-building measure in regions of tension, such as the Middle East and South Asia, where the security environment is such that some States have not been prepared to join the international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime.

Cut-off would help to ease tensions in these regions and reduce the potential for nuclear arms races, thereby contributing to an enhanced global security environment to the benefit of all States.

A universally agreed-to cut-off treaty would, finally, be a central and indispensable element in any verification regime for a world free of nuclear weapons.

We envisage a fissile material cut-off treaty including two basic undertakings: firstly, an agreement not to produce fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, or in any way to assist, encourage or induce others to produce such material for use in nuclear weapons: and secondly, an agreement by all parties, including nuclear-weapon States, to accept international safeguards on all existing and any future facilities capable of producing fissile material that could be used in nuclear weapons.

In effect, this would mean that parties to the treaty would submit to safeguards inspections all enrichment facilities and reprocessing facilities.

Parties to the treaty would commit themselves, within a short period of time after the entry into force of the treaty, to making a declaration listing all the facilities within their jurisdiction capable of producing enriched uranium or separated plutonium.

A system of routine and non-routine inspections would then be established under IAEA to verify these initial declarations and to provide subsequent assurances that these facilities were not being used for purposes proscribed by the treaty.

Obviously, there are a number of difficult technical issues which will need to be addressed in the cut-off negotiations.

These include the exact nature and scope of the verification regime, the method of paying for that regime, and the entry-into-force requirements.

However, the CD has shown in the past that where there is political will, solutions can be found to the most difficult problems, and I have no doubt that all these questions will be resolved.

In a perfect world, it would be desirable to negotiate a single treaty which addressed both future production of fissile material, as well as existing stockpiles.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

But, pragmatically, we should recognize that we can only go one step at a time and that we should not make the perfect the enemy of the good.

While a multilateral and effectively verifiable agreement to cease future production of fissile material may be possible now, it is our strong view that the cut-off treaty should not try comprehensively to address existing stocks.

One reason for this is that countries which have produced, or are producing, fissile material for explosive purposes, including those countries which continue to stand outside existing international arrangements, do not currently see it in their security interests to take the additional step of offering greater transparency of their existing stocks of fissile materials.

This is a reality, however much we may wish it to be otherwise, and a genuine commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation demands that we accommodate this reality in order to make the progress which is realistically possible.

However, once we have all agreed to a cut-off treaty, it is difficult to envisage further significant progress towards nuclear disarmament which does not include, sooner or later, multilateral verification of both fissile material production facilities and fissile material stockpiles.

It is a simple fact that once there is a universal ban on production, we will all want to be confident that ongoing reductions in nuclear arsenals will be permanent.

Australia therefore believes that in taking this first step in constructing, in the words of the mandate you agreed in 1995, a "non-discriminatory, multilateral and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons", we will need to do so in the knowledge that it presupposes a following step which would bring existing stocks under strict and effective international control.

All of us in this place should recognize that a cut-off treaty is an essential step towards nuclear disarmament, and that it is an objective which is worth pursuing in its own right.

Once a cut-off treaty has been achieved, we will be able to consider the next steps towards nuclear disarmament.

Cut-off is achievable in the short term; the only obstacle is that some of us do not, perhaps, recognize its value and do not want it enough to look beyond shorter-term interests.

History tells us that opportunities such as the one which this Conference has before it do not last for ever, and are never served up a second time.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

We could not have predicted the changes which have taken place in the world over the last 10 years, nor can we predict the future.

None of us should assume that the proposed fissile material cut-off treaty will continue indefinitely to attract the support of all nuclear-weapon States.

The CD should not allow the proposal to be used as a bargaining chip or, worse still, to be held hostage by States which have managed to avoid making any multilateral commitments to eschew nuclear weapons.

That would be a gamble, and a serious mistake.

The chip, if that is what it has become, needs to be cashed in now, urgently, while it still has currency.

That possibility and the will to proceed exist now, and we should take full advantage of this fact while we can.

I call on the CD to commence negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty without any further delay.

I should now like to turn to another pressing arms control issue, this time in the area of conventional arms - anti-personnel landmines (APLs).

I am aware that there are those who challenge the competence of the CD to deal with conventional arms as distinct from weapons of mass destruction.

But I find no basis for this challenge in the documents which inspire your work.

Both the Final Document of the first special session of the General Assembly on disarmament and your own guiding "Decalogue" of issues, while according priority to nuclear disarmament, also clearly mandate the CD to address conventional disarmament.

Australia is committed to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting solution to the global landmines crisis.

The recent signing of the Ottawa landmines ban treaty by more than 120 countries gives us cause for hope.

By signing the treaty, Australia and a significant proportion of the international community have entered into a legally binding commitment forswearing the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines.

This is an achievement of major international significance.

The Ottawa treaty is not, however, the end of the battle.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

While the campaign to achieve greater adherence to the Ottawa treaty is important, it is clear that several of the major traditional producers and users of landmines are not in a position, at this stage at least, to sign the treaty.

The conclusions we draw from this are simple:

Those countries should not become alienated from a cause which has mobilized the energies and commitment of many governments and peoples worldwide.

The momentum of the pro-ban movement should not be dissipated with the job only part-done.

The CD should reaffirm its relevance to the contemporary arms control agenda by engaging those outside the Ottawa treaty on the landmines issue.

In so doing, the CD will be contributing to a lasting solution to the global landmines problem for the long term.

That the CD has a job to do here and that the world expects it to do it is clear. The overwhelming support given to the resolution in favour of further action on landmines in the CD, adopted without any negative votes at the most recent United Nations General Assembly, is a clear indication of the will of the international community on this point.

For its part, Australia's continued interest in seeing the CD work on landmines issues is an open and honest attempt to complement the Ottawa treaty and address remaining elements of the global landmines problem at their source.

Australia's aim is to see a CD ad hoc committee established as soon as possible this year with a clear mandate to negotiate one aspect of a landmines ban.

After extensive consultations, we judge that agreement should be possible to negotiate a ban on transfers of landmines.

A ban on transfers of APLs which included major traditional producers of landmines not parties to the Ottawa treaty, would add considerably to a global solution to a global problem.

It would be consistent with and complementary to the Ottawa treaty by creating a space to allow Ottawa treaty non-signatories to make their own contribution to solving the landmines problem.

By attracting the support of important victim countries and past user States, the Ottawa treaty has achieved a great deal.

As we know, however, a good proportion of the landmines currently in the ground, those being laid now and those which notwithstanding our best efforts, will be laid in the future, are the results of the actions of non-State entities.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

It is crucial, therefore, that we attack both the supply and the demand sides of this conundrum - where we cannot persuade political groups to forsake use of APLs, we can take measures to diminish the international supply of these weapons.

This is precisely what a transfers ban would do.

It is of course true that a ban on APL transfers, whether in the form of the Ottawa treaty or embodied in a stand-alone instrument, is not going to remove the problem of indigenous production of landmines, nor is it going to block completely terrorist and other groups determined to use landmines.

But this is not an argument against negotiating such a ban. Possession of landmines being so widespread, partial measures by those not willing to abandon them completely, such as a ban on transfers, are still worth having and worth working for as a step towards total elimination.

In this, as in the case of a cut-off treaty, as in all fields of arms control, we should not disdain partial measures, but seize on them, cement them in, use them as building blocks towards a better and a safer world.

A global ban on landmines transfers negotiated in the CD would pass the most fundamental test of all for what the world has sent you here to do. It would save lives.

I am aware that a range of other issues, in addition to cut-off and landmines, have been proposed for CD negotiation or consideration in the coming year.

In all, in your search for ways to break through the impasse which paralysed this institution 1997, you have some 9 or 10 issues to choose from, if questions relating to institutional reform are included.

Some of these issues seem to me to be not yet ripe for international negotiations. Others are being dealt with, and may be better dealt with, elsewhere.

And while institutional reform and renewal is always important, it is clearly not, of itself, an issue which will restore international confidence in the relevance and viability of the CD.

I began this address with a reference to the biblical passage which enjoins us to beat our swords into ploughshares.

Regrettably, not even in antiquity could all the world's swords be converted to peaceful uses at once.

Similarly, now. The CD has an important, finite capacity to fashion arms control agreements which is lying idle.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

In the interests of your own credibility, as well as the security of future generations, I urge you to put that capacity to work now on the two swords which are currently most apt for beating: cut-off and landmines.

I should like to conclude by briefly surveying a more productive corner of the Geneva landscape.

We should not forget that, while this forum has been unable to agree on a forward work programme, an important arms control treaty is under negotiation.

That is a verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

A legal norm prohibiting the development, production and stockpiling of biological weapons has been in place for some 25 years.

Yet we know, not least from the exhaustive inspections carried out by UNSCOM in Iraq, that this has not prevented some countries from developing biological weapons programmes.

This knowledge should motivate all of us to work assiduously to establish an effective verification regime for the BWC.

To date, progress in the negotiations has been slow.

However, the move last year to a rolling text was a major positive development and one that should lead to an intensification of the negotiations.

I would encourage all the participants in these negotiations, many of whom are represented here, to demonstrate a commitment to putting in place a stringent verification regime that will ensure that the world is free from the threat of biological warfare.

It should not prove beyond our collective capabilities, particularly as many of the issues with which we are grappling were thoroughly dealt with in the CD negotiations that produced the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We are, finally, approaching the first anniversary of the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

In that time, steady and significant progress has been made in putting the Convention into effective operation.

But there are no grounds for complacency, and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons must continue its efforts to ensure the implementation of all Convention obligations, particularly those which constitute the verification machinery.

(Mr. Downer, Australia)

For instance, it is imperative, for the credibility of the Convention, that State parties submit full and complete declarations.

Additionally, while the first nine months of the Convention's life have seen an impressive increase in ratifications and accessions, adherence is far from universal.

I urge those countries which have not yet done so to ratify the Convention as soon as possible.

I wish the Conference on Disarmament a productive year ahead in 1998.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now invite the representative of Austria, Ambassador Kreid, to take the floor.

Mr. KREID (Austria): Like others, we come to this session of the Conference on Disarmament with an open mind and with a willingness to take a fresh look at the not too fresh items of our agenda. Like others, we are keenly aware of that fact that not all items can be approached in the same manner. They are not comparable in scope or stake. Some need careful and lengthy preparation, others appear suitable to become the subject of early negotiations.

For whole year we have racked our brains and turned around the issues in order to discover some common ground, some hidden angle of concord which would allow us to fill this venerable hall with new vigour and activity. We have failed but we need to keep trying.

It is now becoming quite fashionable to say this is the best club in town. Perhaps. I am ignorant of the amenities of other clubs because this one, in spite of its inactivity, keeps me quite busy. At any rate, it is a highly professional club, full of dedicated people who are aware of their responsibilities and of the expectations of the outside world. This is good. It makes for inventiveness and creative thinking. We are in need of it because a club or, for that matter, any group of people, needs common values and common goals, otherwise it is liable to disintegrate. Are we going to allow this?

Austria's commitment to nuclear disarmament is well known. For Austria it is beyond any doubt that the CD should render its contribution to this crucial issue. While we all agree that nuclear disarmament is a primary and priority preoccupation of the world community, there exist profound divisions in this body on the role the CD should play in this context. These divisions have stymied any progress here in Geneva last year. We cannot afford to reiterate last year's failure. We need to build consensus and I think we can do it.

There is one area, namely the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT), which offers good prospects of success. To disdain the chance of achieving a contractual agreement in an area of vital interest to all of us appears

(Mr. Kreid, Austria)

unreasonable. More so, it is irresponsible. Advances in international control regimes for fissile material are not to be lightly dismissed. The threat which the large quantities of highly enriched uranium and plutonium pose need not be stressed. A multilateral negotiation of these issues will advance the cause of a non-nuclear culture and bring us closer to our ultimate goal of a nuclear-weapons-free world. We thus call for the immediate re-establishment of an ad hoc committee to commence negotiations on an FMCT based on the 1995 Shannon report (CD/1299) and the mandate contained therein. A draft decision, which we ask the secretariat to circulate as an official CD document, is attached to this statement. In this context we recommend that the Canadian working paper submitted to the CD on 21 January be taken into consideration.

There are many countries represented here which believe that an FMCT alone is not sufficient. Austria is among them. We would like to see the CD open itself up to a more comprehensive approach. We believe that there is scope for a more systematic and thoroughgoing manner to deal with nuclear disarmament in the CD. The primary responsibility in the field of nuclear disarmament remains with the nuclear-weapons States. We appeal to them to pursue their efforts and we encourage them to push on with unilateral, bilateral and plurilateral reduction measures. Yet, we believe there is room for a multilateral forum to keep the nuclear issues under review and to prepare the ground for further clearly circumscribed areas of multilateral negotiation.

We trust that the nuclear-weapons States understand the concerns of the rest of the world. We trust that their governments are pondering the transformations which have taken place on the geopolitical scene and that they are drawing their conclusions as to the security interests of the present and coming generations. We trust that the nuclear-weapons States will not refuse to embark on a common course with the rest of the world. The way this Conference works - and here I fully share the view expressed by my Canadian colleague - provides ample guarantees that our proceedings will enjoy consensus support. Dealing with nuclear issues at this Conference as a shared but differentiated responsibility could bear fruit in the years to come.

This is why we welcome the South African proposal. It is inspired by an earnest attempt at striking a balance between opposing views. We consider it a promising sign that support has been coming from member States belonging to various groups. To get entrenched in group positions needs to be avoided if we want to preserve an adequate margin of manoeuvre. We also believe that the Belgian statement of 22 January constitutes an important contribution, since it departs from a rigorous analysis of the factual situation.

We are, of course, aware that such proposals do not meet the expectations of everybody but we are firmly convinced that they offer the best chance to proceed to substantive discussion of nuclear disarmament issues with a view to identifying topics suitable for multilateral negotiation.

There are other issues that require serious consideration. We do not see the CD as a one-issue organization. We also do not approve of the

(Mr. Kreid, Austria)

strategy of making this Conference hostage of one single issue. When we establish our work programme we urge delegations to evaluate each item on its proper merits. What then, apart from the nuclear theme, recommends itself to us for being taken up in our work? There is, above all, the area of outer space.

Our interest lies in the prevention of what is generally referred to as an arms race in outer space. There is no such arms race for the time being. But this does not set our mind completely at rest. Recent years have seen technological developments which open up perspectives for new uses of outer space, including military ones. What we need to address is the risk of a militarization or what others call a weaponization of outer space. We should close the door to using or even testing weapons systems in outer space before such programmes have reached a stage where it gets politically difficult to stop them. An examination of the existing legal instruments reveals that there are certain gaps and loopholes that need to be closed if we want to forestall the possibility of a military conflict in or including outer space.

Just as the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 established a forward-looking regime which anticipated certain developments that have in the meantime taken place, we now need to review the situation and bring our legal instruments into line with the advances of military science and technology. Such a move is fully in line with the findings of the Group of Governmental Experts in charge of studying the application of confidence-building measures in outer space, which, in its 1993 report, already came to the conclusion that the rapid progress in space technologies required a continuous review of the need to update and supplement the international regime.

At last year's CD no outspoken opposition was raised against doing work on outer space. We are further encouraged by the fact that the resolution on outer space in the General Assembly was adopted without a negative vote. Austria therefore considers the time ripe to explore ways and means of updating the last CD mandate on prevention of an arms race in outer space.

We agree with those who think that the CD should renew its efforts in the field of conventional arms.

Over the past years we have witnessed the outbreak of devastating conflicts, where the use of conventional weapons has demonstrated the risks emanating from the great concentration of such weapons. A number of approaches for confidence-building, arms control or actual reduction of arms have helped to devise and implement specific measures, particularly at the regional level. But the enormous costs and suffering still caused by such weapons make it imperative for the international community to find an appropriate way for dealing with the issue of conventional weapons.

Against the backdrop of increasingly destructive conflicts tearing societies apart, we need to come to grips with the problems of destabilizing accumulations of conventional weapons, illicit arms trafficking and demobilization of warring factions. In these efforts, the recommendations of

(Mr. Kreid, Austria)

the Panel of Governmental Experts on Small Arms should be taken into account together with the UNDC guidelines of 1996 and the results of the comprehensive study undertaken by UNIDIR.

Within this overall context the question of small arms needs particular attention. Small arms are readily available and easy to handle and thus are the real killers in the kind of conflicts we are overwhelmingly faced with in today's world. We attach great importance to the analysis and recommendations elaborated by the panel chaired by Japan's Ambassador Donowaki and see the need to carry forward pertinent work not only in a purely deliberative way.

A better control of arms flows through a code of conduct appears of primary significance. Elements of such a future agenda were mentioned by us in our 1995 statement. They included a code of conduct adhered to by exporters and importers, the introduction of a certificate restricting imports to the purpose of legitimate self-defence or peacekeeping while assuring that the arms are going to be used in conformity with international humanitarian laws and the possibility for on-site activities of compliance control.

We should not be afraid of the number of difficult questions which we will have to face when dealing with this issue, particularly of methodology, and we should be prepared to cope with the reluctance and reticence of certain governments to go ahead with more ambitious projects such as have recently been undertaken at a regional level.

We applaud in this context the successful endeavours of OAS on illicit manufacturing of and trafficking in arms and thank the Mexican Ambassador for drawing our attention to them.

The CD should find it feasible to focus also on the question of transparency which, at any rate, is only a modest step for further action. But, as in the other areas, we are in no way inclined to belittle such modest steps if they lead in the right direction and give us something to build on once a more propitious climate prevails.

The Ottawa treaty on APLMs has justly been hailed as the triumph of a good cause. The speed with which it was negotiated and the adherence of so many countries demonstrate the timeliness of this initiative, whose success surpassed the expectations of its most fervent promoters. In the wake of this treaty, we have seen an upsurge in governments' demining activities. Donor countries, including my own, have pledged additional funds to deliver the afflicted regions of the world from this scourge. Yet, it will all amount to little if we cannot prevent future contamination. Therefore, Austria is determined to do whatever it can to attain universal adherence to the Ottawa treaty. We are willing to use every forum, including the CD, to advance this cause. The yardstick, a total ban, has been set and we are not willing to deviate from this objective. Austria will judge any proposal on its merits provided it does not merely serve as an alibi for countries unwilling to budge on the substance of the issue. Needless to say, any work undertaken in the CD cannot be complementary to Ottawa. The Ottawa treaty cannot be complemented since it is already complete and all-encompassing.

(Mr. Kreid, Austria)

I do not want to conclude my remarks without having referred to the question of CD reform. It might be an overstatement to say that reform is dear to my heart, but true enough, it gave me pause for a while in my brief tenure as last year's Special Coordinator on expansion. Unfortunately, I then had to conclude - and there is nothing which contradicts these conclusions today - that this Conference is unlikely to move ahead in the area of reform as long as it finds itself in a mood of despondency. I think that the work of your reform Coordinators can only thrive in a climate of confidence and buoyancy. Only if we are propelled by forward-looking concepts, only if we suffer the slings and arrows of day-to-day frustration with the way we handle certain aspects of our work, are we likely to take incisive action in this field.

This is not to say that I consider the task of reform as of little urgency. On the contrary, we need to press ahead with it as vigorously as possible once the Conference is launched on a course of action. This is not a linkage. What leverage could be gained in delaying the nomination of reform Coordinators? It is simply to say that reform should not be attempted in isolation from substantive work for the reasons just mentioned and also because of the signal we would convey to the outside world.

Nobody among us is keen to repeat last year's experience, not even the Special Coordinators. Our experience was unduly short. Although it may not have been the intention of the Conference to bestow upon us such a limited time span of work, standard procedure has it that the CD reinvents its entire subsidiary machinery at each new session. It is worth giving serious consideration to the proposal of the Chilean Ambassador contained in a letter addressed to the President of the Conference on 2 December of last year. In this letter our Chilean colleague suggests that we ought to have standing bodies that survive a session and are given the time required to come to their conclusions. My delegation fully associates itself with this concept and we hope that we can make some headway in this regard, once a coordinator on the functioning of the CD has been appointed.

In conclusion, permit me, Mr. President, to express to you our best wishes for success in your momentous endeavour. Knowing you, I do not hesitate to credit you fully with the virtues required for the challenge you are faced with, namely, patience, perseverance and perspicacity. Armed with these three Ps you will be in a good position to help us in overcoming our current difficulties. There is an additional cause for optimism - namely, the arrival of so many distinguished new colleagues, whom I should like to salute and welcome most cordially in our midst. Their fresh and unprejudiced approach might help us to see certain issues in a different light and suggest new solutions to questions which we have unsuccessfully grappled with in the past.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Austria for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Finland, Ambassador Reimaa.

Mr. REIMAA (Finland): Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. It is a pleasure for me to see an experienced Nordic colleague in this important post. I wish you success in this most demanding task and assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation.

I would also like to warmly welcome all the new colleagues who have recently joined us in the CD. Your fresh ideas and thinking will be of great value to our work. Let me also express our appreciation for the statement just made to the CD by the Foreign Minister of Australia.

In many previous statements we have heard the wish that the Conference should not this year repeat the deliberations of last year. I believe this is the sincere wish of us all. It is of utmost importance for the credibility of this Conference that it is able to move expeditiously into substantive work where results can be expected.

It is the view of Finland that we should build on the work of last year. We should take as a starting point where we finished in 1997, taking into account the subsequent events with significance to the CD work.

The four Special Coordinators of 1997 did outstanding work in relatively difficult circumstances. The Special Coordinators on anti-personnel landmines, on the CD agenda, on improved and effective functioning and on expansion recommended in their reports, before the closure of last year's session, that the work they had started should be continued.

Now that the Ottawa Convention has been successfully finalized, the question of anti-personnel landmines (APLs) has clearly entered a new phase. This was confirmed also by the United Nations General Assembly, which overwhelmingly supported resolution 52/38 H, inviting the Conference on Disarmament to intensify its efforts on the issue of anti-personnel landmines. We consider this a clear indication that the international community expects the Conference on Disarmament to assume its responsibility in this field.

In our view these developments should enable us to start without delay negotiations on anti-personnel landmines. There seems to be a wide understanding that a ban on transfers of anti-personnel landmines could be the issue that the CD should address first. This is also the view shared by Finland. We support the early establishment of an ad hoc committee to start negotiating a ban on transfers of APLs. If some delegations are not prepared to establish an ad hoc committee immediately, we should reappoint the Special Coordinator. He could complete his task within a very short period of time and present his recommendation for the mandate of an ad hoc committee.

It is also important that the Coordinators for so-called reform issues will be able to continue their work. The agenda of the Conference needs simplification and updating. The agenda should reflect the requirements of the modern world and be understandable. The question of improved and effective functioning of the CD has some new topicality now that the whole United Nations system is reviewing its functioning.

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As we have stated earlier, Finland pays special attention to the further expansion of the membership of the Conference. There are several countries able and willing to contribute to the work of the Conference. Continued work by the Special Coordinator will be needed in this area, too.

All four Special Coordinators of last year, though different in nature, could be reappointed at the same time and given the time they need to be able to present their recommendations. It goes without saying that the appointment of the four Coordinators will not exclude appointment of other special coordinators or ad hoc committees, if agreed upon.

As we have stated earlier, Finland places special importance on starting negotiations on the fissile material cut-off treaty. We consider cut-off a valuable step forward in the process of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We hope that the CD will be able to establish an ad hoc committee for these negotiations on the basis of the agreed mandate. We appreciate the ideas on this subject elaborated by Canada and today by Austria.

We note with interest that several proposals have been put forward on nuclear disarmament in general terms. Finland, like all the other NPT countries, sees the total elimination of nuclear weapons as the ultimate objective. Finland welcomes the commitment at the Helsinki summit last year by President Clinton and President Yeltsin to continue nuclear disarmament through the START process. At the moment we see the bilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations as the most efficient way to concrete reductions. Last year, in connection with the NPT discussion on nuclear disarmament, Finland called for more transparency in the implementation of the commitments to withdraw from operational use and to eliminate short-range nuclear weapons. In our view, a regular dialogue on nuclear disarmament issues in an international forum such as the CD and the NPT contributes to building further confidence on the progress made.

The United Nations General Assembly has given us indications also of some other issues where the CD could play a role either now or later, such as negative security assurances, prevention of an arms race in outer space, transparency in armaments and small arms. These are issues that need appropriate attention in consultations on the CD programme of work. The CD has done some earlier useful work on the first three subjects. The mandates of the former ad hoc committees, as well as the result of their work, could be looked at again to see if they can be used as a basis for further work. We also note with interest the proposal on the transfer of small arms made by Mexico two weeks ago.

In this statement I have listed several items that are possible subjects for further work in the CD. We realize that the CD cannot choose the whole menu at once. We hope, however, that through an intensive consultation process and necessary flexibility we can identify those items where preparatory work or concrete negotiations could be started as early as possible.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Finland for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Berdennikov.

Mr. BERDENNIKOV (Russian Federation) (translated from Russian):

Mr. President, it is a pleasure for me to welcome you as a distinguished Swedish diplomat to the Chair of the Conference on Disarmament. I would like to wish you success and express the hope that under your guidance the Conference will be able to adopt important decisions for its future work. I would also like to welcome the new colleagues joining us this year - the Ambassadors of Japan, the Netherlands, Viet Nam, Peru, Sri Lanka, India, the United States of America, Iran and China. I would like to express the wish that, during the time they will be representing their countries at the CD, work will be done which is at least as significant as that which was done by their predecessors.

I cannot fail to note the presence among us earlier today of the distinguished Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, His Excellency the Honourable Alexander Downer. We are grateful to him for the attention he has shown to our Conference and for the important statement he delivered today, which has given us considerable food for thought.

Many speakers who have preceded me noted that this year we managed to begin the session of the Conference on Disarmament in a smooth and effective manner. The agenda of the Conference was adopted at the opening meeting by consensus, and we would like to pay tribute to you for your able leadership that enabled us to make such a quick start. One cannot but see, however, that on this issue the Conference, like last year, has taken the path of least resistance, adopting an agenda which on the whole does not reflect present-day realities. This view is shared, as we have heard, by many delegations. In our opinion, the language of item 1, entitled "Cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament", is obsolete since there is no nuclear arms race any more, but rather a process of active reduction of the nuclear arsenals of Russia and the United States in accordance with agreements between them and unilateral measures - and in a number of important aspects this has been done ahead of schedule. We believe that in the first place the question of the prohibition of the production of fissile material can be addressed under this heading, while a phased ban on anti-personnel mines can be dealt with under item 6, entitled "Comprehensive programme of disarmament".

The Russian delegation supports the earliest possible establishment of an ad hoc committee on the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices with the mandate contained in the report of the Special Coordinator on this issue, as adopted by consensus by the Conference on Disarmament in 1995. Let me remind you that the question of negotiations on an FMCT enjoys broad support in the international community. Thus, in the document on "Principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament" adopted by consensus during the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the States parties to the Treaty on the

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on-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons - and, as you know, there are more than 180 countries of them - expressed themselves in favour of "the immediate commencement and early conclusion of negotiations on a non-discriminatory and universally applicable convention banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, in accordance with the statement of the Special Coordinator of the Conference on Disarmament and the mandate contained therein". We consider this agreement to be an important achievement, and it should not be allowed to be undermined.

We are convinced that the time has come for the realization of an FMCT at the multilateral level as the next step to be taken in the pursuit of systematic and progressive efforts towards the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, and that it should be the subject of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament. It would be a mistake, in this regard, to waste time searching for any other new issues and thus stray away from the implementation of the 1995 consensus concerning an FMCT.

As for the subject area that appeared in our report last year under the sub-heading "Proposals for the 'Cessation of the Nuclear Arms Race and Nuclear Disarmament'", we are convinced that the movement towards the goal of nuclear disarmament should be undertaken step by step, in a consistent manner, without artificial restraint but without excessive haste, without setting goals that cannot be reached at a given stage. No one would deny, I think, that in recent years much has been done in practical terms to reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons and place qualitative limitations on them. The START-1 and START-2 treaties have been concluded, and they will reduce the nuclear stockpiles of the two greatest nuclear States substantially-by two thirds from their "cold war" levels. Agreement has been achieved to conduct negotiations between Russia and the United States on a START-3 treaty, after the entry into force of START-2, which will result in even deeper reductions.

We are in favour of other nuclear Powers joining in the efforts aimed at reducing nuclear weapons. In 1994, the President of the Russian Federation, B.N. Yeltsin, introduced an initiative in the United Nations calling on the five nuclear Powers to draw up and conclude a treaty on nuclear security and strategic stability. This proposal remains on the negotiating table. However, some nuclear Powers believe that further reductions in the stockpiles of the two largest nuclear countries should take place before they join the process of negotiations aimed at reduction and limitation of nuclear weapons. This approach will have to be taken into account.

When it comes to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and their prohibition, which remains our ultimate goal, this would seem not to be possible to accomplish without multilateral negotiations. But in order to reach that point much remains to be done. We are sure that everybody understands this well, and therefore there are no suggestions that the CD should start negotiations on nuclear weapon reductions as a substitute for the bilateral process of START negotiations. There is, however, a proposal for negotiations on "a phased programme of nuclear disarmament for the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons within a specified framework of time". We, like many others, do not subscribe to this approach.

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As you know, Russia and the United States have agreed that after the entry into force of the START-2 treaty, they will immediately begin negotiations on a START-3 agreement, which will include the establishment by 31 December 2007 of lower aggregate levels of 2,000 to 2,500 strategic nuclear warheads. This, incidentally, was welcomed by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/38 M, which was supported by 161 States with none opposed. It is clear that future negotiations among the Five and the implementation of the five-party agreements concerning the further reduction and limitation of nuclear weapons will require a certain amount of time. It is not possible now to say just how much time that will require, but it is clear that the question of the complete elimination of nuclear weapons can in practical terms emerge only after all these intermediate stages have been passed. The question then arises of whether it is possible to deal now in a serious manner with something that may not become a practical matter before the end of the first decade of the next century. Would it not be better to focus on issues that are ripe for action in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, such as an FMCT? In this context we do not believe it timely or useful in terms of the goals of nuclear disarmament to start negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament on a programme of nuclear disarmament within a time-bound framework, and, like others, we will not be able to support the establishment of an ad hoc committee or working group to conduct such negotiations.

It is a matter of great satisfaction that at the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly the largest vote on the issue of APLs was cast in favour of resolution 52/38 H, which invites the Conference on Disarmament to intensify its efforts on the issue of anti-personnel landmines. One hundred and forty-seven States cast their votes in favour of this approach, with none opposed. This appeal by the international community cannot be ignored.

We agree with many points contained in the recently signed Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines. We do not rule out eventually signing that instrument. However, the present reality is that the Convention does not cover the major historical producers and users of APLs. It is our task not to allow the emergence of a gulf separating those countries which have signed the Convention from those which have not, but rather to achieve cooperation between these two groups of States in those areas where this is possible. We have a good opportunity to do so here at the CD. This is why the Russian delegation supports the re-establishment of the post of CD Special Coordinator on the issue of the prohibition of anti-personnel mines with last year's mandate. We support the beginning in the CD of a gradual process leading eventually towards a truly global ban on the production, use, transfer, etc. of anti-personnel mines. Even now, in our view, as a first step, the Conference could embark on the drafting of a global agreement banning the export and import of APLs.

The alternative to work in the CD on anti-personnel mines is - and this cannot be overlooked - a stalemate in this field, which we are convinced is in

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nobody's interest and in particular is contrary to the aspirations of those who, day after day, fall victim to the numerous minefields scattered around the world.

For many years the Conference on Disarmament has conducted intensive work on the question of security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons against them. However, this work was suspended in the period when the CD was involved in active negotiations on the comprehensive nuclear test ban. We are in favour of resuming it. We therefore support the re-establishment at our Conference, at the very beginning of the 1998 session, of the Ad Hoc Committee on "negative" assurances with its previous mandate. We can see no other multilateral negotiating body which could take up this question. There is no alternative to the CD on this issue.

The situation is similar as regards the question of preventing an arms race in outer space. Here, too, the important work which had been conducted earlier in the CD was stopped halfway. It is necessary to re-establish the Ad hoc Committee on this issue with the previous mandate, or, if this causes difficulties for anyone, the post of CD special coordinator should be established with a view to agreeing on a new mandate for the Committee. We are convinced that by no means everything has been done to block all the paths towards outer space becoming a sphere of military competition. Under the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, which was concluded as early as 1967, it is forbidding to place in orbit around the Earth any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction, instal such weapons on celestial bodies, or station such weapons in outer space in any other manner. It is, however, a limited measure because it does not block access to outer space for other types of weapons. In principle, we find some merit in the Canadian ideas concerning the non-weaponization of outer space. Here, we are convinced, there is work for the Ad Hoc Committee to do.

Concerning the question of transparency in armaments, let me note that we would not oppose the re-establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency with its previous mandate. In a number of resolutions the United Nations General Assembly has expressed its support for the continuation of that work. We are convinced that, provided no attempts are made to revise the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee, its work could be useful.

Nor would the Russian delegation oppose the re-establishment of the 1997 posts of CD special coordinators on the expansion of its membership, its improved and effective functioning, and its agenda. There is certainly room for improvement in the functioning of the Conference but, here as well, there must be a clear understanding of the limits beyond which constructive work becomes its opposite. In particular, we, like many others, continue to oppose any attempts to abolish, weaken or revise the rule whereby decisions are taken by the Conference only on the basis of consensus.

(Mr. Berdennikov, Russian Federation)

This year, as previously, the Russian delegation stands ready for constructive cooperation, the search for mutually acceptable solutions to acute international disarmament issues. It is my hope that other participants of the Conference will also seek to make the 1998 CD session active and productive.

We believe that the Conference on Disarmament, notwithstanding the present quite understandable difficulties, due primarily to the need to adjust to the new situation following the "cold war" era, remains an indispensable forum and that it would be wrong to speak about a deadlock in its work. Russian support for the Conference on Disarmament remains unchanged.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of the Russian Federation for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

This concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? In that case, this concludes our business for today. So if there are no more requests for the floor, I intend to adjourn this meeting. But before doing so, I will remind you that the informal open-ended consultations on outer space will begin in this room in 10 minutes' time, at a quarter to twelve.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 5 February 1998 at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.